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LITTLE ITALY
A TRAGEDY
BY
HORACE B. FRY



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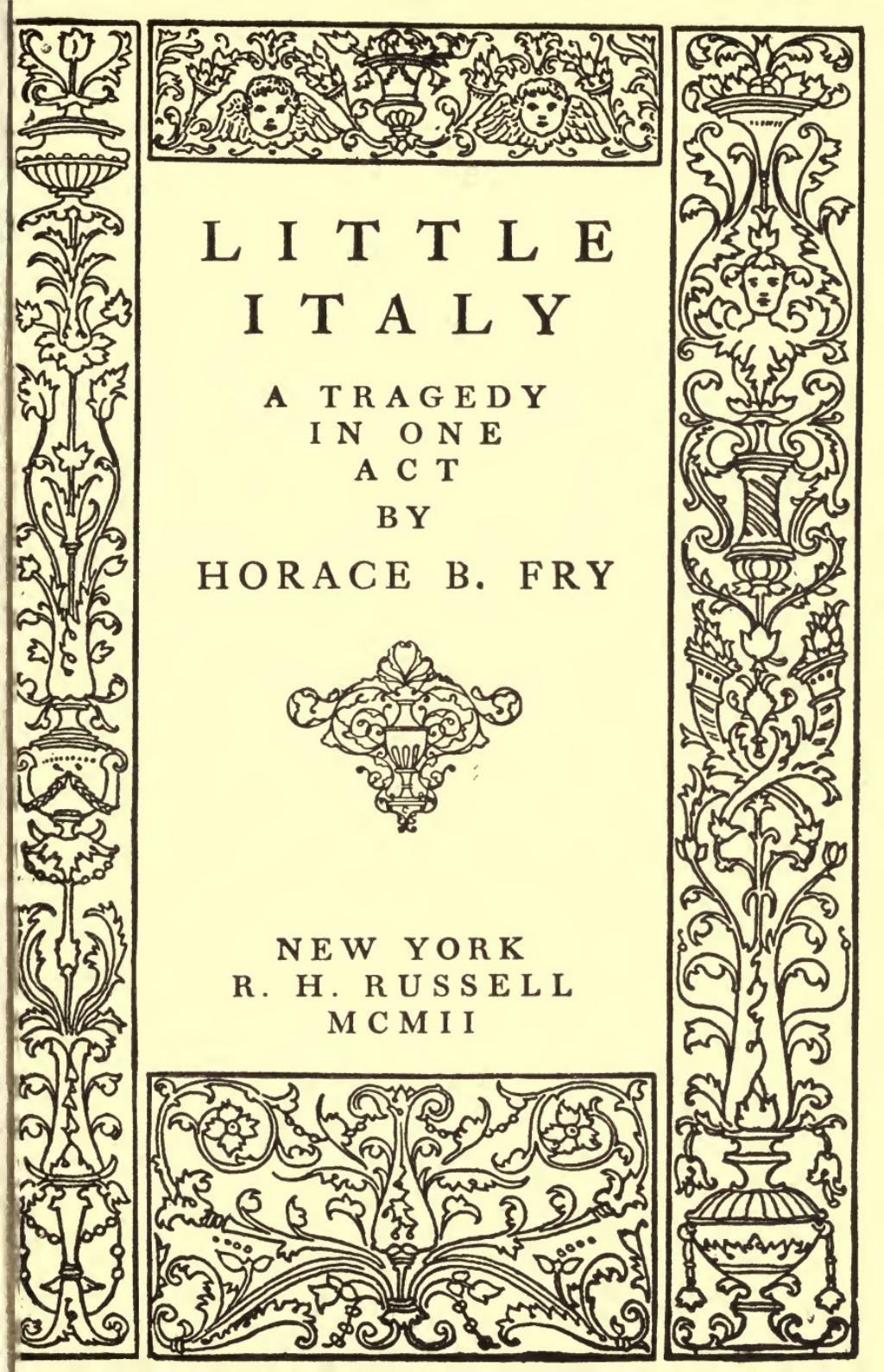


LITTLE ITALY



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Minnie Fiske," is written over a diagonal line.

*Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske
as Giulia in "Little Italy."*

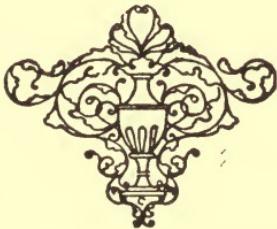


LITTLE
ITALY

A TRAGEDY
IN ONE
ACT

BY

HORACE B. FRY



NEW YORK
R. H. RUSSELL
MCMII

LOAN STACK

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PREFACE



HEN a play has found favor not only with the public but with many of the critics, there may be a valid reason for printing it, for somehow the world is disposed to withhold the rank, no matter how humble the work might be entitled to, until it shall have emerged

in type and between binder's boards.

Some years ago *Punch* gave a picture of several enthusiastic amateurs gloating over a very old violin. They are eulogizing its admirable construction, its beautiful lines, graceful neck, even the pegs seemed to come in for their share. It is at the moment when an unappreciative Philistine, who happened to be present, is asking: "But how will it sound?" The picture shows the indignation of the group which believes it is squelching the Philistine's impertinence with: "Look at the varnish!"

When a play in type is under inspection, it is of very small consequence that its construction and dialogue may be up to the highest literary standard, but "How will it act?" is the question, and nothing atones for the absence of this essential.

Fortunately for the author of "Little Italy," his modest play fell into the hands of Mrs. Fiske. This lady, with

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the skill of a Duse, incarnated his ideas so thoroughly that justice requires that she be regarded as not only his interpreter but collaborator. Equally fortunate was he with Mr. de Belleville, whose creation was worthy of a Salvini; and to Mr. Tyrone Power the author also admits his acknowledgments. Therefore he may say, with all reserve: the question of "How will it act?" has been settled.

Before the passage of the copyright law of 1891 there was little protection and no property that was unassailable in a manuscript play. These conditions must have existed for centuries. Mr. H. W. Mabie, in his admirable life of Shakespeare, says of the Elizabethan stage (p. 140): "These plays were, in some instances, not even printed; they existed only as unpublished manuscripts. In many cases a play did not exist as an entirety even in manuscript; it existed only in parts, with cues for the different actors. The publication of a play was the very last thing desired by the writer, or by the theatre to which it was sold and to which it belonged, and every precaution was taken to prevent a publicity which was harmful to the interests of author and owner. Shorthand writers often took down the speeches of actors, and in this way plays were stolen and surreptitiously printed; but they were full of inaccuracies—verse passages become prose, etc." But in our day we have changed these conditions.

Inasmuch as reading a play on the morrow of seeing it is a delight—provided it is a good play—we are led to refer to the opinions of one if not the greatest of modern dramatists, Alexandre Dumas, fils. He has recorded

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them on the subject of writing and printing plays, believing their value and interest to be enhanced if in type. His prefaces were his favorite channels wherein the social problems exploited on his stage were conveyed as his legacies to the world—the prefaces, generally as long as the plays, prove the beneficial task the stage can perform. He has given his reflections with so much frankness on this subject and the cognate one of dramatic writing at the hands of M. Scribe, that it has been thought desirable to translate the preface to “*Un Père Prodigue*,” and give it as an entertaining appendix to “*Little Italy*.”

The copyright law is now beneficent to all concerned—to the playwright, the novelist, the manager, and the public. The latter need be no longer cheated, at least with impunity, by barnstorming organizations and pirated plays. And if the printed novel makes the most welcome or popular introducer of the play based upon it, why may not an original play introduce itself, stand on its own merits, and secure its own vogue? That the play is not such easy reading as the novel is conceded, and for the reasons M. Dumas details; yet much of the difficulty may be the fault of the author rather than the reader. At all events, the fashion of former times, when plays were read, can come round again, and the taste of a past century can revive; for, since leisure is growing less in our strenuous lives, while our imaginations were never so alert, the concentrated form of the play that the laws of dramatic writing exact may commend it to the readers of our day who have little time to luxuriate in the amplitude of the novel.

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With apologies, therefore, the author presents the short domestic tragedy of "Little Italy," claiming that it truly depicts an obscure form of life in New York City, and that such a woman as *Giulia* really lived there. Nostalgia is a malady not confined to rich or poor, and true love, however humble, will scour the world to find its lost object. These themes appeal to all, and might entertain the reader who never saw the play enacted. "Little Italy" is only one more of "the short and simple annals of the poor."

H. B. F.

*First performed November 17, 1898, at the
Grand Opera House, Chicago, by
Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske,
Mr. De Belleville, and
Mr. Tyrone Power*

L I T T L E I T A L Y
A N O R I G I N A L T R A G E D Y
I N O N E A C T

PLACE—*The Italian Quarter on the East Side of the City of New York.*

TIME—1898.

CHARACTERS

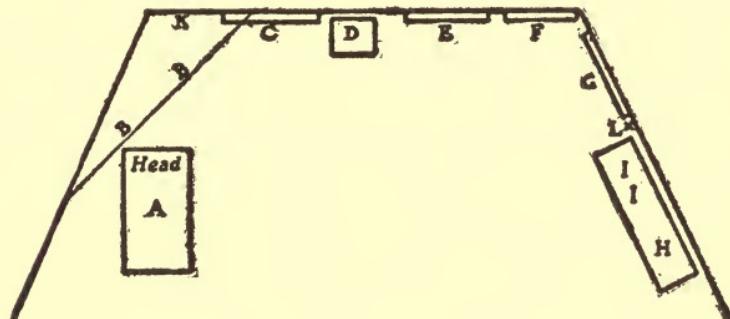
FABIO RINALDI.....*a fat Italian baker of forty*
MICHELE.....*an itinerant singer of twenty-five*
GIULIA.....*{ Fabio's wife, a nervous, hard-working Italian of twenty-two*
GIOJA RINALDI...*a girl of six years, step-daughter of Giulia*

All speak good English except Michele.

S C E N E

A sordid living-room, with a closet-room, L., on the fourth floor of a tenement-house of five floors.

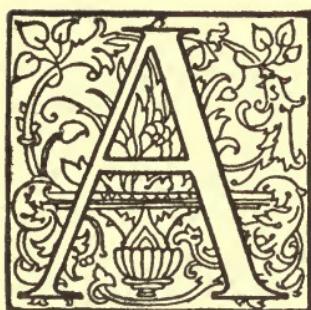
NOTE—In the basement is the Italian bakery of Fabio Rinaldi, which is entered from the street. The window of the scene opens on the court. When this practicable window opens, fire-escapes and drying clothes are seen.



- | | |
|--|--|
| A, Bed. | G, Door to closet where Gioja sleeps. |
| B, Clothes-line and clothes drying. | H, Dresser, with drawers. |
| C, Door opening on stairs. | I, I, Two candlesticks. |
| D, Cooking-stove. | K, Chromo of the Virgin—hanging
on the wall. |
| E, Door to dumb-waiter, the rope is
seen. | L, Black wooden crucifix hanging
on the wall. |
| F, Window overlooking court. | |

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SCENE FIRST.



*T*rise of curtain GIULIA is discovered sitting at the window. She is the picture of a humble toiling young Italian, as she, pensively in a crooning voice, intones:

Quando io ricordo bella Napoli,
Voglio e ti ritorno, oh! citta del ciel!

Siamo stranieri e pelegrini qui,
Poss'io reveder ancora prima io mori.*

[*Her voice breaks with grief, as after a pause she resumes, in low-pitched tones:*]

Oh! Napoli, Napoli, io non ti vedro più.†

[*Despairingly she buries her face in her hands, while the music of the play is still heard on muted stringed instruments.*]

* When I remember beautiful Naples,
I would return to thee, O city of Heaven.
We are strangers and pilgrims here,
Could I see thee again before I die.

† O Naples ! Naples ! I shall not see thee more.

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[Enter FABIO RINALDI, her husband, in the garb of a working baker, fresh from his bakery. He is in his shirt-sleeves and his trousers are white in places. He is carrying a pan containing their dinner, which he sets upon the stove. He approaches her a tip-toe and touches her shoulder. She jumps up.]

GIULIA.

Ah, Fabio! How you frighten! Why d'you come in like that?

FABIO (*contrite, then critical*).

I was thinking Gioja might be sleeping. Diavolo! What's the matter? Eh? You thinking about Napoli again? Always now Napoli, Napoli! You suppose it nice for a man to come in and find his wife always crying because she cannot live in Italy?

GIULIA (*firmly*).

I am an Italian. I cannot be an American. Even every American woman you see on the street wants to live in Italy. No Italian woman wants to live in New York. Not one.

FABIO.

Ah! bah! bah!

GIULIA.

Not one. Do you bring the dinner up from the oven?

FABIO.

Si! [Pointing to the pan on the stove.]

GIULIA (*wearily*).

I did not know it was dinner-time.

[She sets the table; places on a dish the pan of beef

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and potatoes; gets out a bottle of red wine, a pitcher of water, and glasses. There is silence, during which FABIO shows he is greatly disturbed. Business.]

FABIO.

[*Going to the closet door and quietly calling.*]

Gioja!

GIULIA.

No. No. Better she eat nothing to-day, and she will be well to-morrow. Let her go to sleep.

FABIO.

What you think make her sick—eh?

GIULIA.

What makes every child sick—eh? I tell you what makes her sick. She says, "Papa give me apple," and you give her a big green apple. Little more and you have to get a doctor! Eh?

FABIO.

Is she better?

GIULIA.

Si! Look you don't give her more of the same sort.

FABIO.

No, I let you, I will not. [Pause. *They sit at table and eat in silence.*] You make a good step-mother to that little one. [Pause.] Sometimes I say to myself, "Gioja love you the same as if you was her own mother."

GIULIA.

Gioja would not know the difference if some *affanore* of a busybody did not tell it to her. [Pause, while they eat.] Who is in the shop?

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FABIO.

Baldassare.

GIULIA.

Ah! [With an Italian exclamation.] Does that Baldassare know enough to go in when it rains? . . . He cannot serve a customer.

FABIO.

Why d'you say he can't? I count the loaves and rolls before I leave the bakery. See? And when I go back I count 'em again, and what is not there, he gives me the money for.

GIULIA (*petulantly*).

I tell you a dog has got more sense than Baldassare.

FABIO (*placatingly*).

He's got sense enough to give me the money for what is not there when I count the loaves.

GIULIA.

Well, I'm glad to know you're satisfied, for I am not, the way that man works; he cannot send up my coal four flights and take down our ashes. Half the time I must work the rope myself.

FABIO (*slightly sneering*).

Oh, why not? You can work a rope in Napoli, and you can work an oar, too; I hear that. And you go out on the bay with a street singer.

GIULIA.

[After an exclamation in Italian.] What is the matter with you? Is the oven burnt out? What is the matter in the cellar?

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FABIO.

Nothing. Nothing.

GIULIA (*resentfully*).

Well, I think the oven must be burnt out. Eh?

FABIO.

Na! Na! Oven's all right. [*Sullenly.*] Bucefalo's gone lame.

GIULIA.

Ah! Santa Maria! When did that happen? How will you deliver the bread? Oh! . . . Now we cannot go to Central Park next Sunday. Ah! Those rich swells there; they won't miss us—[*sadly*—us poor people!

FABIO.

[*Sadly.*] I give thirty-five dollars for that horse.

GIULIA.

And you got a warrant with him that he is sound.

FABIO.

Well, they do not promise to stay sound forever. Eh?

GIULIA.

You must get another horse to deliver the bread, and that will cost money and cut down our profit.

FABIO.

[*Bringing his hand down on the table.*] I make my loaves of bread too big. That's the truth.

GIULIA.

Then make 'em smaller. . . . Make 'em smaller.

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FABIO.

Na! Na! In Avenue A you cannot sell smaller loaves. If I try to sell small loaves, do you know what the people will say? Eh?

GIULIA.

And what will they say?

FABIO.

"That damned dago is putting on Sixth Avenue airs." And they will get up a Boycott! You don't know 'em.

GIULIA.

No, and I don't want to . . . But why'd you not learn how to read and write? Then you'd know how soon you'd get a show shop in Sixth Avenue.

FABIO.

What good your readin' and writin' do—eh? You know what I did hear la madalena—your big mother—say?

GIULIA.

She said a good many things.

FABIO.

She say: "I spend twenty soldi every week to have Giulia learn to read and write, and she wants to go marry a street singer."

GIULIA.

Na! Na! You never heard her say that. Na! Na!

FABIO.

[*Meaningly.*] I did *not* hear *her* say it.

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GIULIA.

Ah, ha! [With a shrug.]

FABIO.

But she did say that. And I get it straight. She say: "I do not have you learn read and write to marry a street singer."

GIULIA.

What street singer, eh?

FABIO.

How do I know what street singer?

GIULIA.

If I like a street singer in Napoli, before I am married, that is my business!

FABIO.

And you go on the bay with him. I hear that.

GIULIA.

And if I go on the bay with some one in Napoli, before I am married, that is my business, too!

FABIO.

Napoli! Napoli! Napoli! Sempre Napoli!

GIULIA.

Si! Si! Si! Si! You get mad because I do not love New York, and you wish that I forget Napoli, eh? Is it not? It is better to live in those barracks at home than on Sixth Avenue!

[FABIO laughs derisively, and mutters in Italian.]

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GIULIA.

Now I tell you this, Fabio Rinaldi, and just listen to me: Here is New York! Gas here better than oil—Si! Here I cook more easy—So! Hot water better than cold; and easier to pull things up on the dumb-waiter than to break the back to carry 'em. See! But I tell you [*begins to sob hysterically*] I like better even the dirt of Napoli than the clean of New York. Ah, Napoli! Napoli! Non ti vedro più.

[*FABIO goes to her, trying to soothe her, and speaking in Italian.*]

GIULIA.

Na! Na!

[*She goes to the dumb-waiter; rings the bell; a tinkle is heard below. She calls in a long Italian nasal drawl.*]

Baldassare! Holá! Bal-das-sa-re!

VOICE HEARD BELOW.

Ecco! Ecco! Signora Rinaldi!

GIULIA.

You send me no more coal to-day. . . . Eh?
You understand?

[*Below.*] Si! Si! Capisco, Signora! Si! Si!

GIULIA.

From here to Brooklyn Bridge, he is the biggest fool of a janitor.

FABIO.

[*In an Italian attitude.*] Well, what you expect, eh?
For twelve dollars and seventy-five cents a month rent,

L I T T L E I T A L Y

for everything, you cannot have a janitor like a Waldorf dude, with brass buttons and *caprones* on his sleeves, like that! [Indicating chevrons.]

[FABIO washes his hands. GIULIA begins to gather up and wash the dishes. The beginning of an accompaniment on a mandolin is heard and then a song, as if sung in the courtyard below. GIULIA's attention is attracted. She pauses at first, listening mechanically. Then startled, listens with interest. Her expression grows soft and tender in rapt memories of Italy. Then the expression changes, and she hears the song breathlessly. Gradually the truth dawns upon her, and she realizes that it sounds like the voice of MICHELE. Her heart almost stops beating. She seems transfixed, and trembles. Unseen by FABIO she reaches the window and leans far out. Seeing it is MICHELE she remains quite still, as if stunned. Slowly the realization of MICHELE'S presence bursts upon her. She is seized with wild, almost uncontrollable joy. The trembling becomes violent, and nearly overcomes her. Her impulse is to rush to MICHELE in the courtyard below. Then comes the dull remembrance of FABIO. Gradually regaining her composure, it is evident she is considering and planning. She leaves the window.

[All this time, FABIO, absorbed, has been figuring up accounts with the stump of a pencil in an old book which he has taken up after having washed his hands. Pause.]

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SONG.*

(*Italian setting by A. Amadeo.*)

Napoli bella, Iddio col suo sorriso,
Dono ti fè di cielo azzuro e mar,
In terra più ridente Paradiso
Mortale che desia, ah non può trovar!
Fra il profumo dei fiori e fra l'ebrezza
Che scende al core fra le tue beltà!
Fra l'aura, chi olezza su te dolce città,
Volgere il piè vorrei l'esule ancora
Vagante sconosciuto in straneo suol,
Senza amor, e senza speme a cui dimora,
Morte nel core sofria il viso il duol!
Cuna dei sogni miei qui ti sospiro,
L'anelito nel cor!
L'azzuro cielo non rivedrò! No!
Le belle nubi d'or!

Napoli bella! Ah when, when may I see thee?
Napoli bella! the turquoise of thy sky.
City of sunshine where the hours flee in glory,
Absent from thy scenes of love, am I exiled cruelly.
Counting the hours that speed so slowly,
Ere I may hope to turn toward thee, toward thee;
Fevered with doubt, a stranger to contentment,
Aimless I wander, 'mongst faces new and cold,
Railing at fortune, and the slave of blind resentment,
When may I thee see again?

* The music of "Little Italy" has been published by Howley, Haviland & Co., 1260 Broadway, New York.

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Thy bay and clouds like molten gold,
Must I aye dwell from thee apart?
Thou city of my heart!

GIULIA (*feverishly*).

Fabio!

FABIO.

[*Near window still figuring accounts.*] Eh?

GIULIA.

Has that singing man gone?

FABIO.

[*Glancing from window.*] Not yet. [*Song heard again.*] [FABIO *listens intently.*] Ah, listen! [*Pause.*] Giulia, that is your song.

GIULIA.

Eh?

FABIO.

That is your song!

GIULIA.

Ah, na, na. You cannot tell “Non ti scordar di me” from “Santa Lucia”! My song! Ha! Ha!

FABIO.

Certo! Certo! It is your song, Giulia.

GIULIA.

[*Listening, and then as if in great surprise.*] Ah! Si! Si! Isn’t it strange! That is the song I am always trying to remember, and that I never can remember.

[*They listen. The song ceases.*]

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GIULIA (*feverishly*).

It is finished! Has he gone?

FABIO.

[*Looking out of the window.*] Not yet.

GIULIA (*imperiously*).

O! Fabio, I want to learn that song.

FABIO.

Diavolo! What an idea!

GIULIA.

I have had that song in my head ever since I left Napoli!

FABIO.

Well! what of that?

GIULIA.

I want to learn that song. I tell you!

FABIO.

Oh! ridicolo!

GIULIA.

But I will learn it! You hear?

FABIO (*irritated*).

Pazza! pazza per la musica!

GIULIA.

Na. Na. I am not crazy about music, but I want that song. It has been running through my head since five years, and I cannot get it right!

FABIO (*gesticulating*).

Am I to get a fellow like that to teach you? Eh?

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GIULIA.

Si! Si! If he knows it he can teach me.

FABIO.

Where? Where he teach you? Down there in the court, eh?

GIULIA.

Na! Na! He teach me here!

FABIO.

I don't know him. I don't want a fellow here I don't know.

GIULIA.

Giovinastro! You grow particular. You 'fraid he steal the stove there, eh?

FABIO.

Na! Na! Not the stove. There are other things.

GIULIA.

[*Becoming slightly hysterical as her excitement overpowers her.*] For five years that song is in my head, and for five years I try to get it straight, and I say, "I would give five dollars if I can learn that song." And now there is the man who can teach me, and you say, "No, I shall not learn."

FABIO.

Well, well, if you take it so hard, I will have him teach you.

GIULIA.

Ah! Ah! Ah! That is a good Fabio!

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FABIO.

Oh, yes, yes. A good Fabio enough. . . . Oh, yes! [He calls from window.] Vedete! Ecco! Ecco!*

[MICHELE'S voice from below.] Che vuole? †

[GIULIA, hearing MICHELE'S voice, almost faints for joy.]

FABIO.

Ecco, il suonator! ‡

MICHELE.

[From below.] Ha bisogna di me? Eh? §

FABIO.

Si! Si! Venite su!|| [Turns to GIULIA.] Now, I hope you are satisfied.

GIULIA.

Good Fabio! Good Fabio! . . . Dear Fabio!

FABIO.

[Banteringly, without responding to her caress.] Ah, yes, yes. I am a good Fabio when I do all you want. Eh?

[GIULIA goes out of the door, looks down the stairs; coming back to the room, impatiently says: I do not see him; I do not see him. He is not coming up. (She moves about the room.) FABIO goes out, and looking down the stairs, after a pause, calls: Si! Si! Salite su.¶ (Re-enters.) He is coming up.]

* Look here! here!

† What do you want?

‡ See here, Singer!

§ D'ye want me, eh?

|| Yes, yes, come up!

¶ Yes, yes, mount up.

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GIULIA.

Ah! [Unnoticed by FABIO she now moves aimlessly about the room as if in a panic.] Now, Fabio, you make the bargain that he teach me. It is better you make him think you want him for Gioja, eh? That is a good Fabio! Eh? Let him think he is to teach Gioja, and you make a cheap bargain. Yes! Yes! Si Amico mio!

FABIO.

What a fuss you make!

GIULIA.

[Trying to conceal her hysterics.] Oh, I am so glad to hear that old song again! I am so glad to hear that old song again! You make the bargain that he teach me. You let him think that it is for Gioja, eh? You are a good Fabio! I am so glad to hear that old song again! I am so glad.

[Exit into the closet.]

[MICHELE appears at the door—looks in inquiringly.

'He wears a picturesque felt sombrero, corduroy breeches, a red waistcoat, and bright green neckerchief. His mandolin is slung, and hangs on his back.'

MICHELE.

You wanna me?

FABIO.

Si! Si! Amico mio! Si! Si! Come in. Come in. I call you up here because I want you to teach that song to my girl. What do you say, eh?

MICHELE.

Ah! Cana your girl singa, eh?

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FABIO.

Yes, but—well, I don't know. But she always try to sing that song you sing just now. What do you say, eh? Will you teach her? Sit down!

MICHELE.

I can try. Where is she?

FABIO.

What you charge to teach her?

MICHELE.

Ah! I cannot tella. I never givea lessons.

FABIO.

What do you make by the hour?

MICHELE.

I makea ten cents. Sometimes twenty-fivea. Sometimes feefty cents an hour. I make a dollar in forty-ninea streeta in half a minute t'other day.

FABIO.

Well, I give you twenty-five cents, and you give me one hour time, for two, three days.

MICHELE.

Si! Si! I give you the hour that way—tree, for tree days. Eh? Thata make seventy-fivea cents!

FABIO.

Yes! That is, you teach her your song on the mandolin?

MICHELE.

Si! Si! That's alla right! Where is your girl?

LITTLE ITALY

FABIO.

I will ask her. [Goes to closet door.] Hola! Hola!
Giulia!

GIULIA.

[From within.] Si! Si! Subito, Subito!*

FABIO.

You come now. You hear? I have fix for your lesson. [FABIO takes a pan of food from the window, then calling again.] Giulia!

GIULIA.

You go with the supper. I come.

FABIO.

All right! A rivederla, Signore!

[Exit FABIO.]

[When the door has closed on FABIO, GIULIA, in her best gown and head-dress, emerges cautiously from the closet. She regards MICHELE with astonishment, then with delight, rushes into his arms uttering a scream followed by "Ohs" of welcome. In a moment the door opens quickly. GIULIA has just fled suddenly from the arms of MICHELE while putting a finger to her lips to secure his silence.]

FABIO.

[Entering, looks inquiringly and doubtingly at MICHELE.]

What was that cry?

* Yes, yes, right away!

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GIULIA.

Oh, my! Oh, my! Oh, my . . . finger.

FABIO.

Why, what's the matter with your finger?

GIULIA.

I pinched it in that drawer. It hurts.

[*She puts her little finger in her mouth and pretends to suffer.*]

FABIO.

Hurt much, eh?

GIULIA.

Very! [*Taking it out of her mouth to speak.*]

FABIO.

Poverina! Here, let me see!

GIULIA.

Oh, it don't show. [*She holds up her finger.*]

FABIO.

I don't see nothing.

GIULIA.

No; there's nothing to see—not yet. Maybe later.

FABIO.

You think it get black, eh? Look here! [*He takes a large red handkerchief from his pocket and folds it lengthwise, then wraps the finger until it is as big as her fist.*] Now, now you feel better. Eh? But, Diavolo! How are you going to learn to play mandolin? You can play hand-organ without fingers. Ma! Ma! Cos-

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petto! You need fingers to play mandolin. [Chuckling.] [He looks at MICHELE, who replies by an approving nod.] Eh! Eh! Suonator?

GIULIA.

Oh! I'm all right. It's better already. Say! I don't use little finger to play mandolin. Na! Na! All right! You go to your oven.

[FABIO satisfied, after looking from MICHELE to GIULIA, makes his exit. When the door closes there is a pantomime expressive of their lucky escape; then they doubt whether FABIO suspects. GIULIA goes out on the landing to make sure, and returns radiant, showing that FABIO has descended the stairs, when, with a sneer, she quickly uncoils the handkerchief and tosses it in the air.]

MICHELE.

[In a whisper.] Who is he?

GIULIA.

[In a whisper.] My husband.

MICHELE.

Ah! You got a husband?

GIULIA.

Si!

MICHELE.

Ah! And you promise to waita for me!

[He sinks on a chair in a rage which he betrays in the passionate manner of the simple, ignorant Italian.]

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GIULIA.

I could not! I could not! It must be that I marry Fabio Rinaldi, or be turned into the street.

MICHELE.

[*Springing up in ill-suppressed fury.*] That great-a biga devil—your mother!

GIULIA (*acting the incident*).

She wait for me behind the door three hours that night we stay out so late upon the bay; and when I come in she draw out a corset-bone and she beat me with a corset-bone, and I stay in bed a week, and she say: "You thank Santa Lucia I do not break every rib in your body, eh? for you think I give twenty soldi every week for your school for you to go marry a street singer, eh?" . . . She then make me marry Fabio Rinaldi. [Pause.]

. . . MICHELE.

Is he rich man?

GIULIA.

Na! Does it look rich here?

. . . MICHELE.

Whata his business, eh?

GIULIA.

Baker, baker. In the basement.

. . . MICHELE.

I pass it manya time. [Stupefied.] So you married! So you married! [Suddenly he seizes her and demands, with a cry.] Why you geta married, eh? Why you geta married, eh? Tella me!

LITTLE ITALY

GIULIA.

Tell you what, eh? What do you think? That I could go off with you then and get married like that! [Snapping her fingers.] Any madre do the same. You did have no money. You did play. You did sing, and you did not work, and you then made nothing!

MICHELE.

You know why, eh? You not know why? [He takes her in his arms.]

GIULIA.

Na!

MICHELE.

Because I did love you.

GIULIA.

You did love me, and you go way from Napoli. What made you go way? You did not come back. Who made you go way from me?

MICHELE.

I hada no money. . . . I could not singa then like I singa now. I could not starva! . . . Your mother she say to me, "You come round Giulia, and, Madre di Dio, I put a knifea into you!"

GIULIA (*ruminating*).

And she was the woman to do it, lo credo. . . . But when did you come to New York?

MICHELE.

When I comea? I comea six months ago. . . . I looka for you near five year in Italy. I say "She is

LITTLE ITALY

somewhere in Italy." I go to Roma, to Firenze, to Genova. I finda you nowhere. . . . Whena you comea to New York, eh?

GIULIA.

I come five years ago with Fabio and . . . baby.

MICHELE.

Baby! Diavolo! Baby!

GIULIA.

Na! Na! Not my baby—Fabio's.

MICHELE.

Ah! So! He was marry before?

GIULIA.

Si! His first wife died. He had a little girl.

MICHELE.

Ah! That is better!

GIULIA.

Better! Why, what do you mean? [Pause.]

MICHELE.

[Slowly.] You havea no child. You can comea with me!

GIULIA.

You want me to leave Fabio and Gioja?

MICHELE.

Si! You comea with me!

GIULIA.

He is good to me, and I love Gioja!

LITTLE ITALY

MICHELE.

So! So! You love a baby better than you love me!

GIULIA.

Na! Na! But I get used to it here. It is my home. I love Gioja. She is good. I do my work. I try to forget. I try to give you up. Oh! I try—until to-day, I hear you sing. And then I remember Napoli and that night when we are in the boat, and the moon was setting, and you take me far, far out—the grotto way—and the air is still, and the water so smooth, so soft, so silent. And Vesuve—the smoke rising, rising higher, higher, like a thread, and then it spread like that. [Descriptive pantomime.] And O—I forget everything when I hear you sing! You see, I am crazy to see you again! [Then in Italian.] I love you, Michele! I love you! I forget everything but that I love you, and that you are here, here, here with me. Michele, I love you! I love you! I love you! [She is in his arms.]

MICHELE.

Si! Si! You lovea me, and you remember what you say thata night?

GIULIA.

[Cajolingly.] Na! Na!

MICHELE.

[Slowly.] You say: "Michele, I thinka you will do greata things. You will be likea thata other greata Italian—Bonapartè!"

GIULIA.

Did I say that, Michele?

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MICHELE.

Si! You say that in Napoli, and you go marry a baker.

GIULIA.

I could not help it—I tell you.

MICHELE.

Finea words! Finea words!

GIULIA.

It was La Madalena who said I shall not marry a street musician.

MICHELE.

[*Seeing that he is gaining an influence over her.*] A streeta musician! Eh? A streeta musician! Il Trovatore was a streeta musician. [Caressingly.]

GIULIA.

[*Gradually yielding to his influence.*] I love you, Michele!

MICHELE.

Carissima! You comea with me!

GIULIA.

[*Faintly.*] O! stay here!

MICHELE.

Staya here, and see you with another man?

GIULIA.

Oh, do not go.

MICHELE (*firmly*).

Yes, I will go, and you will go with me.

LITTLE ITALY

GIULIA.

Oh! How can I?

MICHELE.

Do you wanna to stay here and die? Or do you wanna go with me? To Napoli. Think of the bay—and our boats—the bluea sky—the music and the moonlight! Thinka! Thinka!

GIULIA.

Na! Na! I cannot think! It makes me wild! wild!

MICHELE.

Comea with me!

GIULIA.

And Gioja!

MICHELE.

You can steala yourself, but you cannot steala another man's child. Comea! Si! Si! Comea!

GIULIA.

Yes! Yes! I will see her. I will kiss her for good-by. . . . Then maybe I go . . . with you . . . Gioja! Gioja!

[Exit into closet. Pause. GIULIA re-enters.]

MICHELE.

[She is irresolute.] See! See! I have plenty money! [Takes bag of money from his trousers pistol pocket.] I makea money. [Slowly.] I saya "I finda Giulia. She's in New York. I keepa these gold pieces till I finda her. I look all over Easta Side, but I find her. See! Looka! Golda! See here! [Hurriedly.] We buy

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ticket to Genova, eh? We go by steamer. To-night! To-night! [She shudders.] He never catcha you. Never! No! He 'fraida! We go to Napoli. To Napoli. I sing in opera. [She looks inquiringly.] You saya No? I saya Yes! They wanta me there. O! Giulia, I am here because I love you so. [Pause.]

GIULIA.

They will say I am a bad woman.

MICHELE.

Who will say?

GIULIA.

[Vehemently.] Everybody.

MICHELE.

Cospetto! Who will knowa you?

GIULIA.

In Napoli!

MICHELE.

Che! Che! Che!

GIULIA.

Fabio! What will he do?

MICHELE.

He pay ten dollar. He get a divorcea.

GIULIA.

He will come after me!

MICHELE.

Na! He staya here to make his bread. He saya, let her go! Woman plenty!

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GIULIA.

Oh! I am afraid.

MICHELE.

Ah! You wanna staya here?

GIULIA.

No! No! [Whispers.] I want to go with you!

MICHELE.

Comea!

GIULIA.

The people in Napoli will mob me!

MICHELE.

Na! Na! You 'fraida, eh? . . . Now, now, Giulia, see! Listen. I tell you this: We go to Napoli. *We* say we married. Then *they* say, Whata you do with Fabio Rinaldi? *We* say, Go see! . . . Giulia, I tella you we have plenty money. People see we have money; then ev'rybody say "All right!" No be afraida! Yes, money makea all right!

[GIULIA begins to move about, putting up her things —packing them in an old bag.]

MICHELE.

Maybe we better sing a little. Rinaldi thinka we very quiet for a music lesson, eh? What you do now?

GIULIA.

[Who is writing on a half-sheet of paper, which she has found in the drawer of the dresser.] I must tell Fabio!

LITTLE ITALY

MICHELE.

You ah! You tella Fabio, and he tella the cops!

GIULIA.

Na! Na! Fabio cannot read. It will take him an hour to make it out. [She writes, spelling out the letters continuously, the audience not making out the words.] I want him to take good care of Gioja. [She pins the sheet of paper to the door R. C.]

[MICHELE takes the bag, goes to the window, and looks out into the court below.]

MICHELE.

[Starting back.] Corpo di bacco! There is Rinaldi in the courta! He is coming upa!

GIULIA.

Ah! [She has opened door R. C.]

MICHELE.

We go upstairs to the nexta floor. When he come in here, he shuta that door; then we go downa quick—understand! Down the stairs, eh?

GIULIA.

Na! Na! You go down by yourself. I go down this way! [She opens dumb-waiter door.]

MICHELE.

Is it safe? It won't breaka with you? Eh?

GIULIA.

Na! It carry two hundred pounds coal easy!

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MICHELE.

Senza dubio?

GIULIA.

Si! Si! Senza dubio.

MICHELE.

I don't like that!

GIULIA.

Meet me at the butcher shop.

MICHELE.

Eh?

GIULIA.

At the butcher shop! At the corner.

MICHELE.

Si! Si!

GIULIA.

Quick! Quick! Give me the bag. I better take it.
Yes. Quick! Quick! At the butcher shop at the corner.

[MICHELE gives her the bag. She enters the dumb-waiter, and descends in sight of the audience. MICHELE closes the door of the dumb-waiter and cautiously makes his exit by the door R. C., which he closes behind him. The stage is empty, and the rope is heard to creak regularly, until interrupted by a scream and a distant crash. Pause.]

[Enter FABIO. He has a pan of food which he holds with a towel at the handles. He pauses at the door seeing the room empty. Carrying the pan he goes softly to the door of the closet, opens it carefully, and calls softly.]

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Giulia! (Pause.) [Still carrying the pan, he goes out door R. C., and stands in the hall and calls.] Giulia! [Pause. The audience hears FABIO walk along the hall and knock at a door. A voice calls to him in Italian, and he is heard to ask:]

FABIO.

Is Signora Rinaldi there, Signora?

VOICE.

[A woman's voice replies.] No, Signor, she is not here.

FABIO.

[Again calling in the hallway.] Giulia. [Louder.] Giulia! [Pause. He comes back into the room, still carrying the pan, and shuts the door.] Where did she go? [Puts pan on the stove then. He opens the door of the closet softly. Sees that GIOJA is awake.] Ah, Gioja! You wake, eh? You well, eh?

GIOJA.

[Outside.] Si ! Si ! Papa. Si ! Sí ! Ma dové mamma—dové mamma ?

FABIO.

I don't know, bambina. She gone out. She soon come back. I go see where she go. [He starts to exit R. C. Sees paper pinned on door. Takes it down. Tries to read it. Puzzled.] Stupido! Imbecille! Even my baby knows her letters, and I cannot read. [Exit into closet, and is heard to say:] Qui, Qui, Bambina! You come read this little note for old papa, eh? [Re-enter carrying GIOJA, who is in her night-gown.]

LITTLE ITALY

GIOJA.

Yes, papa.

FABIO (*playfully*).

You no more sick?

GIOJA.

No, caro papa.

FABIO.

That's good! That's good! No more green apples, eh? Na! Na! You come read this little note for papa. Eh? [He sits and takes GIOJA on his lap. GIOJA spells out to herself, and reads the words of the note.] I . . . do . . . not . . . love . . . you, . . . Fabio. . . . I . . . never . . . have . . . love . . . you. . . . I . . . go . . . away. . . . I . . . never . . . come . . . back. . . . Take . . . good . . . care . . . dear . . . little . . . Gioja. . . . Giulia . . . Rinaldi. [Pause. FABIO muses as the reading begins. Quickly his sorrow breaks forth in groans, and then he starts as if stabbed at every word. When the reading ends, he carries GIOJA to the closet. He exits into it with her, then re-enters, and speaks back into the closet.] You lay down there little while. Papa come back soon. That's a good little girl. [He goes C. and picks up note.] I do not love you, Fabio. I never have love you. [Long pause with business indicative of his growing fury.] I do not love you, Fabio. [Then with a wild cry.] Ma! Maledetto suonator! Avro il sangue del suo cuore!*

[With sudden energy and rapidity he takes off his baker's apron and gets out his coat and hat. He

* Cursed Singer! I will have his heart's blood.

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mutters to himself rapidly. A clamor of voices is heard. FABIO does not seem to hear it. At first distant, it gradually grows louder and nearer. Men and women are now heard outside chattering and exclaiming in great excitement, and a mingling of Italian and English. The crowd is noisily swelling up the stairway. Voices are also heard in the court. Several women are heard to scream. FABIO does not hear. He continues to talk to himself as he makes ready to go out. He starts towards door R. C. The door is burst open. The hall is seen to be crowded with Italians. The panic, the confusion, and the excitement must all be firmly suggested, but not obtruded. MICHELE enters, carrying the nearly lifeless body of GIULIA. Business. MICHELE and FABIO place GIULIA on the bed. FABIO pushes out the Italians who would force their way into the room. He bolts the door. The men regard each other.]

MICHELE.

[*Points to the dumb-waiter.*] She went down that way!

[*FABIO goes to the dumb-waiter and opens it. The audience sees the frayed end of the dangling broken rope.*]

FABIO (with a yell).

Che!

[*The men regard GIULIA tearfully.*]

L I T T L E I T A L Y

G I U L I A .

I . . . never . . . see . . . Napoli. . . . Oime! . . . Oime! [Screams in agony.] Gioja! Gioja! Ah! [As she murmurs, screams, and calls.] Poor me! Poor me! I cannot see! . . . Fabio! [Pause while dying scene is acted.]

M I C H E L E .

She dying! She dying!

[GIULIA's voice has grown inaudible.]

F A B I O .

[Rushing to window and calling.] Baldassare! Baldassare!

[The murmur of voices has been heard throughout the scene, moderated so as not to detract from the action. Many voices from the court.]

V O I C E S .

Si! Si! Si! Signore!

F A B I O .

[At the window.] Chima subito! Subito, un padre confessare la mia moglie! *

V O I C E S .

Si! Si! Si! Signore!

[FABIO hastens aimlessly about the room, then takes the two candles from the dresser, lights them and puts them on each side of the head of the bed. He then unhooks a crucifix of black wood from the wall, which he places upon the breast of

* Call quick, quick, a priest to confess my wife.

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GIULIA, who is now lying dead. He takes his rosary and kneels by the head of the bed.]

FABIO.

O, Giulia! O, Dio! Dio! Dio!

[MICHELE shows his grief. His hands before his eyes. FABIO raises his head. Seeing MICHELE, FABIO rises, goes to the dresser, and takes out a long carving-knife. He steals revengefully toward MICHELE, who catches FABIO's right arm as it is raised aloft to stab. They wrestle.]

MICHELE.

Hah! Whata you do? Eh? You wanna killa me? One dead! One not enougha. Eh?

[Hearing the fight, the people in the hall call out and try to force open the door, but do not succeed. FABIO and MICHELE part. MICHELE tries to escape, and seizes a poker as FABIO makes a second onslaught. The people beat on the door and shout.]

MICHELE.

You wanna to killa me. Eh? You want to go to Sing a Sing? You wanna sit in that 'lectricala chaira! Eh? . . . Who take care little Gioja then? Who? Who?

[FABIO drops his knife, and staggers to a seat to bury his face in his hands.]

GIOJA.

[Entering from closet, weeping.] Mamma! Mamma!

CURTAIN.

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The Preface to “*Un Père Prodigue*” by Alexandre Dumas, fils.



O-DAY, if you have no objection, we will talk shop, and we should concede to the business of the theatre its proper share—the share so prominent that at times it passes for being the whole of it.

Of all the different palpable forms of thought the theatre most nearly approaches the plastic arts. No man should engage in it without knowing its material processes, for there is this difference: in the other arts he learns the processes, but in the theatre they must be found out, or, to state it exactly, he must be endowed with them by nature.

One may become a painter, sculptor, or even a musician, by dint of study, but not a dramatic author. He is so at the first, or never, even as he is blond or black, without his volition.

It is a caprice of nature to have constructed your eye of a peculiar style, in order that you might see in a

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certain way that which is not absolutely the truth, but which, however, ought to appear only so for the moment to those whom you wish might see what you have seen. He who essays to write for the stage reveals at his first attempt this rare faculty of seeing and showing, be it in a college farce or a parlor charade. It is a science of optics and perspective that enables the sketching of a personage, a character, a passion, an action of the soul, with a single stroke of the pen. The *trompe l'œil* is so complete that it happens often that the spectator, who has turned reader and wants to feel again and alone the emotion which moved him with the crowd, fails not only to discover this emotion in the *written thing*, but the place where it occurs. It was a word, a look, a gesture, a silence, or a combination purely atmospheric, had held him under its spell. It is that something which is the genius of the business, if these two words can go together. We could compare the work of the theatre, in its relation to other literary forms, with ceiling painting as related to mural, or to easel pictures. Heaven help the painter if he forgets that his work is to be seen aloft, and viewed at a distance from below and lighted from underneath.

A man of little value as a thinker, moralist, philosopher, or writer, can still be a man of the first order as a dramatic author; that is to say, as a setter-in-motion of movements purely outside of man. Yet, on the other hand, to be, for the drama, a thinker, moralist, philosopher, or a writer who is heard, it is indispensably necessary to be gifted with these particular and natural

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qualities of the man of little value. In short, to be a master in this art, it is necessary to be an expert in the business.

If one can never reveal these natural qualities to those who do not possess them, nothing is easier than to recognize and develop them in whoever has them.

The first of these qualities, the most indispensable, that which dominates and governs, is the logic which comprehends good sense and clarity. Truth therein may be absolute or relative, according to the importance of the subject or the place it occupies; the logic should be implacable between the point of departure and the destination, in order that it shall never be lost to view in either the development of the idea or the fact. It is needful, besides, to project it continually under the spectators' eyes from the side of the person or of the thing for or against which one's plot would culminate. Then the science of the minor parts is to be considered; that is to say, of the *blacks* or shadows—the oppositions, in a word—which establish the equilibrium, the ensemble, the harmony; then the brevity, the rapidity, must be provided for, which does not allow him who listens to be diverted or to reflect, even to take a long breath or to debate within himself with the author; then the knowledge of the *plans*, which does not let slip to the background the figure which should be kept in the light, nor advance into the light the half-tint figures; then that progression—mathematical, inexorable, fatalistic—which multiplies scene upon scene, event upon event, act upon act, unto the denouement, which ought to be the sum and the proof, indeed, the

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exact notion of our limitations, which forbids us to make our picture bigger than its frame; for the dramatist, who has the most to say, must say it all from eight o'clock until midnight, one hour of the time to be deducted for the *entre-actes* and the relief of the spectator.

I have not spoken of imagination, because it is the stage that, outside of the author, supplies it in the interpretation, through scenery and accessories, while it puts into flesh and blood and into words and images before the spectator the people, places, and things which he would be obliged to imagine, if he were in front of a book. Nor have I spoken of invention, for the excellent reason that invention does not exist for us. We have nothing to invent. We have only to look and remember, to feel, to co-ordinate and give back, under a special form, that which all the spectators should immediately remember to have felt or witnessed, without being able to give an account till that time. The reality at the bottom, the possible in the deed, the ingenuity in the medium; these are all that can be asked of us.

The dramatic art which requires a business by itself, ought it to have also a style by itself? Yes. One is never a dramatic author completely unless he has a manner of writing, like a manner of seeing, strictly personal. A dramatic work ought always to be written as if it were only to be read. A performance is only a reading by several persons for those who do not wish, or who do not know, how to read. It is through those who go to the theatre that the piece succeeds, and through those who do not go that it is confirmed. The spectator gives

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it notoriety, the reader confers upon it fame. The play that one does not desire to read without having seen, nor to re-read after having read, is dead, even had it two thousand successive representations. Only it is necessary, in order that the work shall live without the aid of the interpreter, that the style of the author shall be equal to the transporting to the eyes of the reader the solidities, proportions, forms, and tones that audiences would applaud. The language of the greatest authors is merely for the dramatic author so many suggestions; it teaches him only words, and, besides, there is that host of words that he should exclude from the body of his vocabulary, because they are deficient in relief, vigor, bonhomie—I would even say deficient in the triviality needed for this action of the true man on this false ground.

The vocabulary of Molière, for example, is the most limited; he uses always the same expressions; he plays the whole human soul upon five and a half octaves.

The language of books; that is to say, of the thought presented directly to the reader, may be fixed once for all. Whoever writes a narrative, nay, even a dialogue destined for a single reading, may appropriate the form of a master of the same kind of literature as his own—say of Bossuet, Voltaire, Pascal, Jean Jacques, Sand, Hugo, Lamartine, Renan, Théophile Gautier, Sainte Beuve, Flaubert—only no one would want it of him, and no one would take kindly to such homage to tradition and purity. The origin, however, might not be recognized, and one might feel him to be a writer and proclaim him as such. He would be that, indeed, if even his pure and elegant style

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did not contain one new idea, for we see every day the spectacle—form making us believe there is depth beneath it.

In the drama there must be nothing of the kind. The moment we follow the language of one of our masters we are no longer reverent disciples, but insupportable copyists. What we may take from the masters in this art is their way of seeing things, and not their manner of expression. Each one has his factory stamp, which nobody can copy without becoming a counterfeiter. Read Corneille, Racine, Molière, Marivaux, Beaumarchais, for we hold to these dead, and note the differences—how each of them has poured his own particular alcohol into this running stream that goes by the name of language.

This language of the theatre, does it need to be correct? No; not in the grammatical sense. It is necessary though, before everything, that it should be clear, colored, penetrating, incisive.

Je t'aimais inconstant; qu'aurais-je fait fidèle? is an abominable fault of grammar that the verse did not require. If, however, it had been needed to paint the same sentiment in prose, Racine, *who knew his business*, would have presented it with the same inaccuracy. There are turns of phrases and of words which of themselves have a flash, a sonority, a sense which make of them necessities, showing that they must be admitted at the risk of compromising the text. Thus the old academic writers, comprehending nothing of our form, treated us in advance as barbarians. It was the misunderstanding arising be-

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tween the two manners which caused La Bruyère to utter this absurd truth: “ Molière only needed to have avoided jargon and to *write purely.*”

Fénelon thought and taught like La Bruyère in speaking of our file leader, Molière. La Bruyère was right, and he was also wrong; that is why I have allowed myself this expression, “ absurd truth,” in citing the opinion of an author that I revere more than any, who consolidated the language of books, who has inundated the world with truths that he was incapable of expressing from the stage, because there he would have engraved in hollows where he should have sculptured in relief.

[The author here cites examples from Molière to prove his defective grammar, which are omitted by the translator.—H. B. F.]

These inaccuracies, so shocking when read, not only pass unnoticed on the stage, in the intonation of the actor and the movement of the play, but, furthermore, they will give life sometimes to the ensemble somehow; like little eyes, a big nose, a wide mouth, or tousled hair, will confer more grace, or character, or passion to a head than would Greek regularity, which has been made the dominant type of beauty because it is necessary to establish in an art a fixed ideal; after which every author may go his own way with his own temperament, and upset tradition if he is strong enough to do it. It is thus that schools are founded and men dispute, which is not a bad way to kill time, for it has its *longueurs*, as we say at the theatre.

“ Now, if we turn from incorrect grammar to inaccu-

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racy of another sort, perhaps the style of M. Scribe, for example, would satisfy you?"

"Certainly, if the style of M. Scribe covers a thought. Of what odds is the material of the gown if the woman is beautiful?"

"It is through his form, then, you tell me, that M. Scribe fails."

That is an error. It is never through the form that one fails, but through the depths. Translations are the proofs of what I claim. Every day we admire through translations foreign writers, who have no reason to envy the style of M. Scribe, because the thought being strong and solid, it rises to view athwart this form, colorless and soft, even as high mountains pierce through the mists of the morning. Think like Eschylus and write like M. Scribe, then no one will ask of you more. Unfortunately, or fortunately rather, this discordance is impossible. The expression will be always, in spite of yourself, at the level of the thought; exact and firm if the thought is elevated, feeble and bombastic if the thought is vulgar. Elevation and sincerity are wanting in M. Scribe, for from him such expression does not come; being unconvinced, he cannot be eloquent. A valueless wine, a cheap bottle. Besides, he is not looking for comedy, he is only looking for the *theatre*; he does not wish to instruct nor moralize, nor correct people, he wants to amuse them; he does not seek glory which immortalizes death, but rests contented with the success that popularizes the living, and with that fecundity that brings wealth. Prestidigitator of the first order, exhibitor of conjuring boxes, he shows you a situ-

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ation, like a nutmeg, makes it pass; now you must laugh, now weep, now scared, now it's cats, now dog, through two, three, or five acts—and you will find it out in the denouement. It was always the same with him; there was nothing to say. The prose with which he accompanied these tricks of pass-pass were uttered for the purpose of misleading, of watching his audience, and of gaining time for the promised effect—the moment for the nutmeg to become a .48 bullet and return just the same into the juggler's box.

The séance over, the candles extinguished, the nutmegs restored to their trick-bag, the boxes returned to their nest—one inside another—the cat and the dog put to bed, the voices silent, the epigrams flown, there remain in the spirit or soul of the spectator neither idea, reflection, enthusiasm, hope; neither remorse, agitation, nor happiness. The auditor has looked, listened, and been puzzled; he has laughed, cried, and has passed the evening. He has been amused, which is a good deal, but he has learned nothing. He mentions to somebody something or other, perhaps, but has not thought enough about it to make it a subject of conversation. In short, M. Scribe has all the qualities which denote talent, but not one of those that proclaim genius. Three times his figures have taken on the appearance, not of real life, however, but of the heroic. These were when Meyerbeer lent his sovereign breath. But only once has he half opened the door of the temple and surprised the mysteries of the Good Goddess. He reached high comedy in putting forth his "Camaraderie," in doing which he had as much reason to praise as to

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blame himself. He proved therein that he might have become one of the race of observers, and, by devoting himself more and craving riches less, and by revering art, he might have been a great man. He did not wish it; may his wish be gratified.

Nevertheless, the stage owes him for an innovation altogether unexpected, which proves exactly the poetic measure of this author. Until he came, love, and marriage with the loved one, had been the final reward of the hero of comedy. The poets represented the heroine as beautiful, chaste, passionate; in a word, as interestingly as possible. M. Scribe thought he ought to add to these qualities a charm of the first class, from his point of view. So he added the three per cents—no happiness being probable in marriage, which crowns everything, if the young girl does not bring a big dot to the young man. And this was so exactly the ideal of the public to which M. Scribe addressed himself that it promptly recognized him as its spokesman. Therefore, during the third of a century, as the high priest of this bourgeois religion, he said mass every evening at the altar of the nimble six-pence, turning around from time to time in the middle of the ceremony to say to his flock, his hand on his gospel: *Ego vobiscum.*

Collaborators, pupils, imitators, and speculators have not been wanting to carry on this work, so facile, agreeable, and remunerative, while all the time that it violates public taste and leads serious art astray, Scribe thus worked in our sociology. Unfortunately, the master wore us out, and so we finished, weary of his colonels, the women

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widows, the pensionnaires so rich that their dots were hunted like a chase, his artists supported by bankers' wives, the *croix d'honneur* folk dabbling in adultery, the powerful millionaires, and the shop-girls who were making queens walk as they wished. The need was felt of hearing some common sense, something that might light up, encourage, and console the human species, which is neither so egotistic nor so stupid as M. Scribe shows it. A robust soul, loyal and pure, appeared, and "Gabrielle," with its simple and touching action, with its beautiful and noble language, was the first revolt against this theatre of convention. The husband, intelligent, paternal, lyrical, was exalted upon the same stage where he had been laughed at for more than twenty years and always made ridiculous, as always blind and always deceived by an amorous wife.

"Why this side issue about M. Scribe?" you will ask me. "For what purpose is this attack?"

I do not attack M. Scribe; nor do I beat any big drum before my own barrack to seduce you from entering my neighbor's; but, given this question of *business*, I study and explain the man who is the incarnation of it, and has pushed his trick so far that, as I have said above, people sometimes have mistaken it for the art itself. No one has ever known better than M. Scribe—without conviction, without naïveté, without philosophic purpose—how to put into action and meaning, if not a character nor an idea, at least a subject, or a situation especially, and evoke from it logically scenic effects. No one knew better than Scribe at the first encounter how to assimilate the thought of the first comer, how to adapt it to the stage—oftentimes in the

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proportions and in a sense totally opposed to the combinations of the first author—utilizing all, from the dispositions, the *début*, the name, the beauty, the ugliness, the fatness, the leanness, the arms, the feet, the looks, the color of the hair, the elegance, the stupidity, the wit of the comedians—even up to the tastes, passions, prejudices, hypocrisies, yea, to the cowardice of the public that he addressed and from which he gained his fortune and his liberty. He is the most extraordinary improvisor we have had for the theatre; the one who knew best how to set going the personages that did not exist. He is the Shakespeare of Chinese shadows.

Well, into that collection of four hundred pieces that he wrote, alone or in collaboration, let drop “*Il ne faut jurer de rien*,” or “*Le Caprice*,” or “*Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée*” (these were the little comediettas of a poet who was the most artless, the least expert at the business) and you will see all the Théâtre Scribe dissolve and volatilize, like mercury in a heat of three hundred and fifty degrees; for the reason that Scribe worked for the public without putting into his work anything of his heart or soul, while De Musset wrote with both heart and soul for the soul and heart of humanity. Hence sincerity endowed him, without even his suspecting it, with all the resources of the *business* which constituted the only merit of the other.

Now the conclusion?

It is, that the dramatic author who shall know man as did Balzac and the stage as did Scribe will be the greatest dramatic author that ever lived.

May, 1868.

APPENDIX

PRESS NOTICES

From "The Stage in America, 1897-1899," by Norman Hapgood.

"Of the three recent American attempts to make a fatal end acceptable, only one has the consistency from the beginning which Robert Louis Stevenson demands. 'Barbara Frietchie' and 'Nathan Hale' have first acts of frivolous comedy, and waver between melodrama, tragedy, and comedy throughout; so that they can only be called tragic for want of a better caption. The third and only true tragedy is in one act. It is by a wholly unknown writer, Horace Fry, and its discovery is characteristic of Mrs. Fiske. It is not easy to tell how much of the powerful effect was due to the playwright and how much was due to the superb acting of Frederick de Belleville and Mrs. Fiske, but in any reasonable division there is enough to reflect glory on both, especially since it is so rare for a tragedy to be written in America, and since this little piece, by the simplicity, force, and elevation of the feelings depicted, belongs almost clearly to that domain. If the passions depicted have been high and simple, if the essence of life seems to have been given so that it is right that life should end, we are satisfied, even if the tears stand in our eyes; and this is tragedy. If, as in 'Tess,' our attention has been taken up with details—bad luck, misunderstanding, and misfortune—and the depths of the soul have not been freely sounded when the knell comes, it is not tragedy, but rather what is known as 'a disagreeable play.' 'Little Italy' was worthy of the brilliant acting it inspired. . . . Aided by Mr. De Belleville's deep emotion, as the husband, the protagonist (for it is part of the nobility of the play that he, and not the escaping lovers, are the centre), and by the direct passion of Mrs. Fiske's picture, this little piece had in it such rare worth that it ought often to be revived."

From "The Boston Transcript," January 31, 1899.

"At last we have a play which combines the brevity and terseness of one act with all the dignity and complete authority of the conventionally formed five-act tragedy. Mr. Fry has accomplished no insignificant task with his 'Little Italy,' and he has moreover accomplished it in no insignificant manner. His plot is both realistic and poetic in the extreme. His heroine, living in the Italian Quarter of New York, is overcome by an irresistible feeling toward her own sunny Italy, and when a former lover sings below her window in the street she induces her husband to call him up that she may learn his song. Left alone, they resolve to return to Italy together, but the wife is overtaken by an accident, explained by a very graphic theatrical device, and is brought back dead in her lover's arms.

"This tale is condensed with unusual skill into a play occupying less than half an hour, and is throughout perfect in its construction, clear and forcible in dialogue, and thrillingly tragic in its effect. Its action does not halt for a moment, and pursues its course as swiftly and relentlessly as the heroine herself rushes blindly and irrevocably to her doom. Mr. Fry has the power of creating an impalpable and pervasive atmosphere by the simplest means known to playcraft. He does not lay on his colors indiscriminately and with no other purpose than to suggest Italy and the Italian people superficially, but he in-

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spires each character with a dominating soul which indicates feeling and temperament much more strongly than mere costuming and scenic accessories can do. His 'Little Italy' bears from the outset the stamp of fatality, and creates an effect equivalent to that arising from Thomas Hardy's work at its best.

"But 'Little Italy' is to be all the more highly commended for the opportunity it gives to show Mrs. Fiske's art in yet another phase. Her *Giulha* is a veritable creation. She realizes the picturesque and merely pictorial element in the woman's character so perfectly that we seem to see and to understand her before she utters a word. And when she speaks she lays the woman's heart open before us. Once again let us say that Mrs. Fiske's greatest triumph in 'Little Italy' is that she visualizes the woman so thoroughly that we can see into her very soul. No lover of the dramatic art need hesitate for a moment over the problem as to whether he ought to see Mrs. Fiske."

From "The New York World," March 31, 1899.

"A one-act tragedy, called 'Little Italy,' by Horace B. Fry, which was performed last night by Mrs. Fiske at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, may be set down as one of the genuine successes of the year. It held a large audience spell-bound from beginning to end with its rapid accumulation of fine dramatic emotions.

"Curtain-raisers, as a usual thing, are either harmless trifles or else incoherent, undeveloped plays, carrying no conviction. 'Little Italy' is neither one nor the other. It is an intense and finished work of art; with nothing essential left out."

From "New York Evening Sun," March 31, 1899.

"Mrs. Fiske scored a new triumph last night, and a new playwright, Horace B. Fry, gained his first hearing. The only wonder of it all is why Mrs. Fiske should have kept this remarkable play, 'Little Italy,' from the public until the very fag-end of her season at the Fifth Avenue. To say that 'Little Italy' is the best one-act play that New York has seen in years is putting the matter too mildly. Within the short half-hour which it takes to play it, Mr. Fry manages to concentrate a tremendous amount of pathos and of passion. And as an artistic production it takes rank as a gem. As for Mrs. Fiske, she was completely metamorphosed. It took minutes for the audience to realize that the dark, squat, broad-limbed woman with despair in her eyes was really that slim, intense little parcel of nerves and intellect in a new disguise. And yet it was not her disguise alone that made her performance so uncommon. Both she and Mr. De Belleville, who played her husband, seemed to have reached down to the very soul of these two Italians and to have laid them bare.

"It is rarely indeed that any audience witnesses such superb performances as these two artists gave in this little play last night. The play itself is as concentrated and intense as 'Cavalleria.'"

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